

[Communications]

Arnold Manoff [??] - Folk Stuff 17

COMMUNICATIONS: (Cont'd) Marine Local ACA, 10 Bridge St.

(Union hall around one o'clock in the afternoon. Eight to ten men sitting around on folding chairs, one guy typing a stencil. The men are waiting for a quorum to start a meeting. Interviewer is told he can hang around until the meeting starts. The hall is a small one, about 15 by 30 feet. One wall is all bulletin board and part of another wall is all blackboard charted in columns and headed "Assignment List." There is a short wave receiving set in the hall and every once in a while one of the men strolls over to it, twirls the dial, listens to some code and shuts it off. Most of the time the radio beacon dot dash dot is heard. Five men are sitting around in a half circle, the guy typing the stencil in the middle, typing, listening to the talk, and interjecting a wise crack every once in a while. Tony, a skinny, nervous telegrapher twisting around on crippled legs in doing most of the talking. Two Mexican looking guys, watch him, and nod or object once in a while in a half interested sleepy way. A young telegrapher with blonde hair in a tweed suit and sweater is also listening. He doesn't say anything, but smiles down at the floor. This is Degleman. The stencil maker, a red head is Ben Russek.

TONY: -

I'm gonna tell ya somethin now! Take the big guys! Roosevelt! The others! All right! They aint the once makin all the trouble. It's the others! The small politicians if ye know what I mean. Why those god damn phonies, those reactionaries now, in the Congress, that are takin away the relief money from the poor people. Those rats, in my opinion are the ones to blame for everythin. Ye know what I mean! Compared to them Hitler is a god damn gentlemen gentleman ! And I don give a god damn what ya say to the contrary, it's those

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guys that are makin all the trouble in the world. If we don clean them out in the end it's gonna be just too god damn bad for us. What we gotta do now is be friendly with Mexico and Canada. That's my opinion and I don care what ya say to contradict me!

BEN: -

Yea! Yea! An a floy, floy. That's his constructive opinion!

TONY: -

Constructive. I'll tell ya somethin constructive. I don know the difference one way or the other but I know what I'm talkin about. I'm for the workin class. That's all I know. I'm for the workin class all the time. Take Mexico —

VOICE FROM IN -

Hey Ben! Cut out the crap and finish the stencil! Will ya. Cut the crap there will ya Ben?

BEN: -

All right, all right. We got Mexico here now with a floy, floy. Go ahead Tony. Mexico, Mexico with a floy doy!

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FIRST MEXICAN:

(shaking his head) Persecute the people because their religion in Mexico. No. No. No good. No good. And take away from oil men property, investment and capital. No good. Wrong. Bad for the people. Hurt the country!

BEN: -

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Take away the property from the bosses. Whaddya know! Take away the poor bosses bosses' property. Mm! Mi!

TONY: -

After all here's the point. I respect a man's religion. I don care what it is but I respect it. You gotta have faith. After all if ya don have faith you're out of the picture. Ye know what I mean now! If you don believe in one thing how the hell can you be expected to believe in anything? If I see a man right down here on Broadway praying in front of a goddamn fire plug why I respect that man. Right down on his knees in front of a fire plug, I respect him to the limit. It's the people without faith I don care about. You gotta have faith.

DEGLEMAN:

If I saw a man on his knees in front of a fire plug, I'd say if he wasn't thirsty, he was crazy.

TONY:

That's the difference! Not me. I respect him and aympathize with him. I know he believes somethin."

VOICE FROM THE OFFICE:

Where's that stencil!

BEN:

Shut it off. For Chris sakes. We're talkin here.

SECOND MEXICAN:

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Take away the oil and scare away the money. The bosses don't make money? The bosses don't pay wage.*

BEN:

Always worried for the bosses the bosses. I'll tell ya what. Frig the bosses. If there's a man that hates the bosses that's enough for me, I respect him. That's constructive ya hear Tony? The bosses, the bosses, Hey Johnny! There's a man in here that's worried about the bosses. Whaddya know!

TONY:

That's what I said. Constructive. Take Pancho Villas. He did somethin. I respect that Pancho Villas.

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He was no good. He was cruel to the people. In 1916 I was with the American army and we brought back his saddle. And you can still see that saddle in Dallas. They got it in a museum. That saddle had a woman's skin stretched over it. That Pancho Villas. He was a barbarian. He killed this woman because she hated him. He raped her and then he killed her and stretched her skin over his saddle. A woman's skin on his saddle. We captured the saddle and brought it to Dallas. Don't believe it. It's true. They still got the saddle.

TONY:

Just the same! I'm for the workin man. And another thing. I'll tell ya somethin that'll surprise ya. I'm for the rich man too.

BEN:

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Constructive. I'm for the rich man that's tryin to help the poor man. Not the other kind. I sympathize with everybody that's tryin to help the poor man.

MEN:

Whaddya mean no meeting! We gotta have a meeting!

BEN:

Can I help you with something? Yeh. Yeh. I see, I see. You mean all the crap that's slung around here? Yeh. I see. You're perfectly welcome to it. That's the most I can say for him. He's sincere. We got characters around here. I suppose you've been told this before. We think we're the screwiest bunch in the world. The nature of the work. Oh they talk all the time. Can't stop them. You wanna finish a meeting by eight? Midnight it's still going strong. That's the kind of a union it is. Every man get's his say for as long as he likes. They'd like to break us those friggin ship owners. We're important in the merchant marine set up. They'd like to break us. Just a few months ago we had all kinds of trouble, stooges, detectives, gangsters, everything. Trying to break us up. There's a stooge in here right now. I could point him out. Wait'll we get the goods on him. It never fails. We always get the goods on them and then Zip. Out they go!

When a man's out fo of work we say he's on the beach. I guess you know that one. We also say he's on the ship S.S. Beach Maru. Maru. yeh. That's a Japanese word they put after the name of every ship. I think it 4 must mean of the sea. Strange isn't it? If you take it from the Latin, the word Mar. There must be some connection between Latin and Japanese. Yeh. All these guys are workin on the S.S. Beach Maru. Just an expression. A lousy operator is called a lid. Yeh. A lid sends like he's using his foot for keying. Sure. Practically a guys signature by the way he keys. oh yeh. Listen to this! There's a certain type of keying known as the Lake Erie Swing. Yeh. Wat is it? Wait, I'll tell you soon. Hey

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Johnny! Ever hear of the Lake Erie Swing? Yeh. What is it? Wait, I'll tell you soon. Hey Johnny? Ever hear of the Lake Erie Swing?

JOHNNY:

Sure. Old as the hills. Glass arm an crap like that. You mean the Tankers Swing.

BEN:

Same thing. It comes when you're pounding brass for a long time. You get a glass arm which results in the Lake Erie Swing. Hey Degleman. C'mere (here's a guy can help you out. Used to be a newspaper man) Degleman. Tell this guy what the Lake Erie Swing is.

DEGLEMAN:

It's a kind of bad rhythm, jumbled up, disagreeable, all slurred up. Comes when your arm goes dead and you get a jerky fist, no control.

BEN:

Give him some dope Degleman. I'll leave you two. Sure. Glad to have you around. Anytime.

DEGLEMAN:

What can I tell you? Yeh. Yeh. I see. Well I don't know what you can get out of me
———Yeh, I was newspaperman. Didn't like it———Well I'm sort of abrupt
and the other guys like to talk a lot. I don't talk much———Yeh———Sure
———I hold a Guild card. ———Yeh I organized the Guild out on the West Coast
———Yeh———then I quit and went to sea. I was down around the Gulf last year
around June. Things are bad down there. Awful. Around Corpus Christie———Awful
———Bill Nelson? ———Yeh I heard of him down there———No never ran

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across him. Last job I was on an unorganized job. ——Tried to organize [themp?] sure. Things were bad last year. ——Took a year for the bottom of the 5 list to move up to the top. ——I'll be shipping out in a month or two now. Yeh I'm near the top of the list now——Ever hear of Tankeritis? It's a kind of debility you get working on tankers, you know, 48 days out, 18 hours ashore. You get very irritable and nervous, can't be with people, unsocial. Sure. I had it for a time. It's the worst thing in the trade. Tankeritis. No special disease. It's everything. Sure. The union is the only thing good for it. The only cure. ——Better conditions——no more Tankeritis,——

Ever hear the expression Fiddler's Green? That's a place six miles below hell. That's where you go like Davy Jone's Locker. Only this is worse. It's six miles below hell. I got it from an old seaman. You know they're trying to give us officers status now. We don't want it. The men are against it. Yeh we're through with that friggin shipowner crap.——Well I guess you know that on the American and English ships they call us Sparks and on the Italian, French and Russian ships they call us Marconi.

Here's an interesting thing. The best operators are Americans. Give me five seconds and I can tell whether a man is an American or a foreigner. No it aint only Americans that say it. Even the foreigners will say that when a foreigner is good he operates like an American. I don't know why. The American send cleaner, more distinct. Another thing I've noticed is that if an operator has a speech defect it comes out in his sending. I knew two brothers who stuttered when they spoke and both of them stuttered the same way when they sent. What the union means to us? Yeh?

Take this union. This here union is like a family. It means more than any one individual in the union. And that's no crap. It means more to the men than any friend they have. And for better or worse the policies are the expression of the whole gang. For example take that assignment list. That's a very complicated thing. It was evolved and evolved over a long time, each guy threw in his bit, changed it, developed it, hammered it out and that's 6 the way it worked out until everyone was satisfied.

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I don't know how to say it. What this union means you can't say just like this. But I'll tell you something. This small gang of men started the whole drive in the marine industry. They were the core of the whole thing. Like a seed.

The union is a tree. We're the branches and the leaves. I guess that's the best way to put it. The union is a tree.

Sure. My name is Degleman. D-E-G-L-E-M-A-N.

Sure. I'm not much for talking but I don't mind letting off once in a while.